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30 October 1967

The Soviet "Aircraft Carrier"

1. The Soviet "aircraft carrier" recently launched in the press is the result of imprecise reporting on the forthcoming 1967-68 edition of Jane's Fighting Ships, which for the first time in public print notes the existence of Soviet helicopter carriers.

2. The first of these units was spotted as an unusual ship in early 1965, and by late 1965 it was agreed in the community that the ship in question was a helicopter platform, with either an ASW or amphibious assault mission. Review of photography showed that construction had been started in 1963, but the characteristics of the prototype could not be determined until 1965.

3. We now know of two of these ships, one of which is undergoing final shakedown in the Black Sea and should be operational in the near future. The ships are about 625 feet long and carry surface-to-air missiles. [redacted] reported in June, 1967, that these ships, the Moskva and the Leningrad, will each carry a complement of 1,400 and 70 helicopters. The ships are similar to the French Jeanne d'Arc, which is now classified as a "cruiser helicopter carrier."

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4. Special subcommittees were informed of the detection and identification of the prototype in the first available meetings of November-December 1965, and January 1966. Because of the classification, however, there was no general publication until April, 1966, when the information was broken out in the Central Intelligence Bulletin and in special memoranda. The ships were discussed in NIE 11-14-66, October 1966. The full Armed Services Committee was briefed on 1 March, 1967, and the ships were also covered in a special memorandum, "The Naval Threat to the U.S. Fleet," prepared for Mr. Blandford on 18 July 1967.

5. In all of these references, the terminology was "helicopter carrier" or "helicopter platform," so that recipients may not have equated them with the subsequent impression conveyed by the press that the USSR is building ships similar to U.S. attack and support carriers.

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